

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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CHAPTER XII.

A drowsy chant, if you please, of sailors in jerseys and tarry caps, of rolling gait, strong tobacco and diverse profanity, of cutters, and blunderbuss schooners, and tramps, canvas and steam, some of them honest, some of them shady, and some of them pirates of the first water who did not find it necessary to hoist aloft the skull and bones. The arms are dotted with them. They remind you of the once prosperous merchant run down at the heel, who slinks along the side streets, ashamed to meet those he knew in the past. You never hear them mentioned in the maritime news which is the society column of the ships; you know of their existence only by the bleached bones of them, strewn along the coast.

You who crave adventures on high seas, you purchase a ticket, a steamer chair, and a couple of popular novels, go on board to the bare of a very indifferent brass band, and believe you are adventuring, when, as matter of fact, you are about to spend a dull week or fortnight on a water hotel, where the most exciting thing is the bugle call to meals or the discovery of a card sharp in the smoking room.

Take a real ship, go up cargo, to the South seas, take the side streets of the ocean and learn what it can do with hurricanes, typhoons, blistering calms, and men's souls. There will be adventure enough then. If you are a walking, either you are made strong, or you die.

An honest ship, but run down at the heel, rode at anchor in the sound, a four-masted of the kinder breed that is her stanchion line of business was hauling barges up and down the coast. When she could not pick up enough barges to make it pay, why, she'd go gallivanting down to Cuba for loads of tobacco or even to the Iberian for the heaven smelling onion

glances to trail down the cutwater. His neck stretched from his collar like a turtle's from its shell.

"Well, I'll be hornsawgged!" he murmured, shifting his cut from starboard to port.

Caught on the fluke of the anchor was the strongest looking box he had ever laid eyes on. There were leather and steel bands and diamond-shaped ivory and mother of pearl, and it hung jauntily on the point of the rusty fluke. Anybody would be hornsawgged to glimpse such a droll jest of fate. On the fluke of the old muckboot, by a hair, you might say, in all the wild sea yards he had ever read or heard there was nothing to match this.

Treasure!

And Steve was destined never to be passive again. His first impulse was to call his companions, his second impulse was to say nothing at all, and wait for an opportunity to get the box to his bunk without being detected. Treasure! Diamonds and rubies and pearls and old Spanish gold, all hanging to the fluke of the anchor.

"Hornsawgged" in a kind of awe-some whisper this time. "An' we beadin' for th' Bahamas?" For under his feet he could hear the rhythm of engines. "What I do? If I leave it, some one else see it." He scratched his chin perplexedly, and the end went back to starboard.

He took off his coat and carefully dropped it down over the mysterious box. It was growing darker and darker all the time, and shortly neither coat nor anchor would be visible without close scrutiny. Treasure, greed, cupidity, crime. Steve saw only the treasure and not its camp followers. What did they call them?—doubloons and pieces-of-eight?

He ate his supper with his messmates, and ate heartily as usual. It would have taken something more vital than meat—treasure to distract him to duty.

He was rich; and the moment a man has money he has troubles; there is always some one who wants to take it away from you. His bunk was on the port side, and there was plenty of hiding space between the iron plates and the wooden partition. He intended to loosen three or four planks, and then when the time came, slip the box behind them. Some time during the morning the forecastle would be empty, and then would be his time.

But he suffered the agonies of damnation during the four hours' watch. Supposing some fool should go rummaging about his bunk and discover the box? Suppose... But he dared not suppose. There was nothing to do but wait. If he created any curiosity on the part of his mates he was lost. He would have to divide with them all, from the captain down to the cook's boy. It was a heart-rending thought. From being the most open and frank man aboard, he became the most cunning. From being a man without enemies, he saw an enemy even in his shadow.

At four o'clock he turned in and slept like a log.

In the morning he found his opportunity. For half an hour the forecastle was empty of all save himself. Evidently he pried back the boards, found the brass beam and gently laid the box there. It was a mighty curious looking box. Once he had sailed up the Chinese coast from the Philippines, and he judged it to be Chinese in origin. He tried to pry open the cover and feast his eyes upon the treasure, but under the leather and ivory and mother of pearl was impervious steel. It would take an ax or a crowbar to stir that lid. He sighed. He replaced the boards, and by name to all appearances his shield was again.

But all the way down to the Bahama he was moody, and when he answered any questions it was with words spoken testily and jerkily.

I know whut th' matter," said Dunkers. "She's in love."

Shut your mouth!"

"Did I tell yuh?" laughed the tailor, dancing toward the companionway. "Steve's in love, an' he didn't git drunk enough on shore t' satisfy his whale of a belly!"

A boot thudded spitefully against the door jamb.

"You fellah let me alone, I'll bash in a couple of heads!"

"O, yuh will, will sub?" cried Dunkers from the deck. "If yuh want a little exercise, yuh can beat on me yuh moonstick swab! What's it matter with yuh, anyhow? Where'd sub git this grouch? What've we done t' yuh?"

"I'm willin'," said Jim. "Steve won't stand for no scrapping aboard. Well, I'll have th' thins done right in th' custom sheds. We'll have a finish fight, Queensberry rules, an' may th' best man win."

"Who's talkin' t' you?" grunted Steve. "Who did I say?"

"Onions, ye lubber! Don't we know what onions is? Ain't we smelt 'em so long that ye could stick yer nose in th' starboard light an' never smell no onions? Onion! Pass th' caffey."

Steve helped himself first. The man who spoke barked over him, and they were not on the best of terms. There was no real reason for this frank antagonism; simply, they did not splice any more effectually than cotton rope and hemp splices. Sailors are moody and superstitious; at least they generally are on hookers of the "Captain Manners" breed. Steve was superstitious and Jim Dunkers was moody and had no thumb on his left hand. Steve hated the sight of that red nubbin. He was quite certain that it had been a whole thumb once, on the way to gouge out somebody's eye, and had inadvertently compacted with somebody's teeth.

Spanish doubloons and pearls and diamonds and rubies! It was mighty hard not to say these words out loud. Steve had not told about the name he had seen on the box; and Dunkers had not thought to. The name Hargrave had instantly brought back to Dunkers' mind the newspaper stories he had recently read. There was no doubt in the world that this box belonged to the missing millionaire, who had drawn a million from his banks and vanished, and moreover, there was no doubt in Dunkers'

disputes could be settled only in one manner, by his gallowsed fate.

When the old muckboot had some day Steve was going to buy it and hang it over the entrance of the Gibson house slithered down into the smiling waters of the bay. Steve concluded that discretion was the better part of valor. He would steal ashore on the quarantine tug which lay alongside. He was willing to fight under ordinary circumstances, but he must get his treasure in safety first. They could call him a wicher if they wanted to; devil a bit did he care. So he pried back the boards of his bunk wall, took out the box, eyed it fondly, and noted for the first time the lettering on it:

STANLEY HARGREAVE.

He wrinkled his brow in the effort to recall a pirate by this name, but was unsuccessful. No matter. He hugged the box under his coat and made for the gangway, and inadvertently ran into his enemy.

Dunkers caught a bit of the box peeping from under the coat. "What's yuh got there?" he demanded truculently.

"None o' your damn business. You lemme by; hear me!" "Aint none o' my business, huh?" Where'd yuh git a box like that? Steal it? I cry, I'm goin' t' have a look at that box, my hearty. It don't smell like honest onions."

"You lemme by," breathed Steve, with murder in his heart.

Suddenly the two men closed, surged back and forth, one determined to take and the other in hold this mysterious box. Dunkers struggled to uphold his word not that he really wanted the box but to prove that he was strong enough to take it if he wanted to. The name on the box flashed and disappeared. It was a kind of shock to him the and Blossom went battering against the rail. Dunkers' grip slipped and so did Blossom's. The result was that the box was catapulted into the sea. With an agonizing cry, Blossom leaped far over. He saw the box oscillate for a moment, then sink gracefully in a zigzag course, down through the blue waters. Fainter and fainter it grew, and at last vanished.

"I'm sorry, Steve, but yuh wouldn't let me look at it," said Dunkers, contritely.

"All right, if yuh say so Bill. Well, here's th' warn."

And when he had done, Vroom smoked quietly without speaking.

"Don't you believe it?" demanded Dunkers, truculently.

"But the goods Jim You've heard of Wyant & Co."

"Sure I've heard o' them. Best divin' apparatus they is."

"Well, this gen' here is Mr. Brooks, general manager for Wyant & Co. I can O.K. him."

Vroom threw an appreciative glance at the bartender. He was not affiliated with the Black hundred, but he had often aided Vroom in minor affairs.

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"Six hundred feet of water, if I've got my reckoning right. The anchor lies 40 feet, but the starboard side drops sheer 600. You awfu' Why didn't you bring the box to me? A man has a right to what he finds. I'd have taken care of it for you till we got back to port. I know, you were greedy, you thought I might want to stick my fist into your treasure. And you'll never find it in 600 feet of water and tangled, porous coral! That's what you get for being a blazed hog. As for you," and the captain turned to Dunkers, "get your damage and your pay and hant for an other boat back I won't have no murder on board! Cap-

tain's orders, I'll have you know."

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mind that this million lay in the Bahaman waters. It had been drawn up from the bottom of the sound, under the path of the balloon. He proceeded, then, to take a most minute range. It would require money and partners; but half a loaf would be far better than no loaf at all; and he was determined to return to New York to find backing. Finding is keeping, on land or sea.

Now it happened that his favorite grog shop was a cheap saloon across the way from the headquarters of the Black Hundred, and Vroom occasionally dropped in, for he often picked up a valuable bit of maritime news. Dunkers was an old friend of the bartender, and he proceeded to pour and gurgle down his throat a very poor substitute for whisky. He became communicative. He bragged. He knew where there was a million, and all he needed was a first-class diving bell. A year from now he would not be drinking cheap whisky; he'd be steering a course up and down Broadway and buying wine when he was thirsty. He was no miser. But he had to have a diving bell; and where the blue devil could he get one with \$12 and an Ingersoll watch in his pocket?

From his table Vroom made a sign which the bartender understood. Then he rose and approached Dunkers.

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